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GREATER SIDON AND ITS "CITIES OF THE DEAD"

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One of the major problems facing archaeologists today is that many of the structural remains of Sidon, be they ancient edifices or necropolises have served as a source of building materials. In the latter part of the 19th century Reverend William M. Thomson voiced his alarm. "*The stones of Sidon, Tyre and Sarepta have been carried recently to Acre, Beirut and Joppa by boat in immense quantities and, after being cut afresh and much reduced in size are placed in buildings which, in turn, will fall to ruin in a hundred years, when the same process will be repeated until they are found no more*"[1]. Ignorance and man's greed resulted in the wanton destruction of many valuable finds. The American missionary F. E. Hoskins wrote in 1887: "*Two years ago I saw them unearth a handsome sarcophagus in the orange gardens at Sidon: a guard sat on it for a week and then the authorities decided to move it into the city. So they sent out men who deliberately smashed the marble with a sledge hammer and carried it into the city on the backs of donkeys; it was deposited in the yard of the French Khan, a government building, and there it still lies in the mud*"[2].

Ancient Sidon had necropolises to the south, east and northeast of the city. Although nothing remains of these vast burial grounds today, fortunately travellers to Lebanon in the 19th century, and members of foreign archaeological missions to Sidon made drawings of the tombs, some of which were quite detailed. It is thanks to their observations that these necropolises have been located although a large portion lies underneath the modern buildings that mushroomed on the site over the years.

1816
A Painted Tomb at Helalié-Baramié (William John Bankes)

A vast necropolis was situated east of the main Beirut-Sidon road in the vicinity of Helalié-Baramié to the east/north east of the city. In 1816 William John Bankes, a guest of Lady Hester Stanhope, visited an underground painted tomb near a valley called Wadi Abu Ghyas (fig. 4, p. 77). The tomb had been discovered two years earlier when a camel accidentally crossed over the rocky ground that had protected it over the centuries[3] (fig. 1).

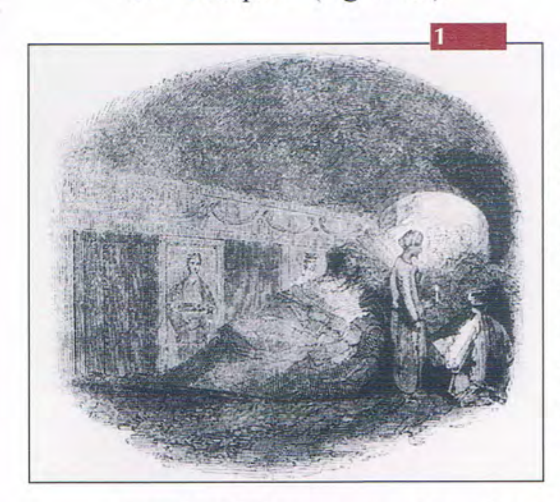
Bankes made a plan of the tomb and its *loculi* as well as a faithful reproduction of the frescoes it contained: the representations are of nine men and women who appear to be youthful servants and

1 W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, London, 1870, p. 110.

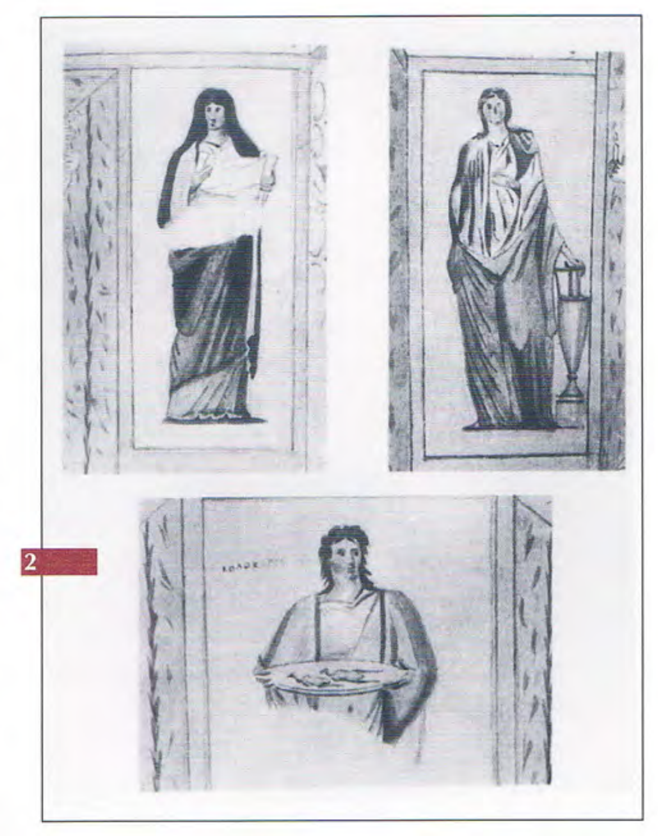
2 W. K. Eddy, "Letter from Sidon, Phoenicia", *American Journal of Archaeology* III, 1887, p. 101, note 3 (Letter from F. E. Hoskins to W. K. Eddy dated May 4, 1887).

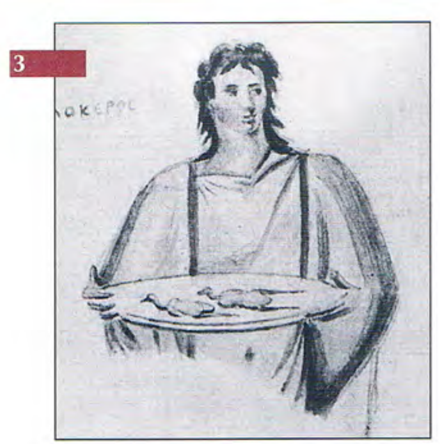
3 A. Barbet, P. -L. Gatier and N. N. Lewis, "Un tombeau peint de Sidon", *Syria* LXXIV, 1997, p. 141-156. This tomb has also been described by C. L. Meryon, *Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope* II, London, 1846, p. 338-353 with on p. 340 a drawing entitled "Interior of a Greek Sepulchre".

who are painted full-faced and three-quarter full size. The name of each servant is written in Greek letters. Most of them carry plates destined for the funeral repast with a description of the contents. They advance, three by three, towards the owner of the tomb. The latter is surrounded by two young women allegorical representations of "Culture" and the "Banquet" (fig. 2&3).



Dr. Charles Meryon was Lady Hester Stanhope's physician and was present at the time Bankes made his drawings. He was upset when Bankes removed two panels of the frescoes but also realized there was no local interest in such works of art and that ultimately they would probably be destroyed if left *in situ*[4]. Meryon packed the frescoes and the drawings for expedition to England: the frescoes in a wooden case and the aquarelles in a metal box[5]. They are presently in the National Trust and County Record Office in Dorchester, England.





4 A. Barbet, P.-Louis Gatier and N. N. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 141. See also C.L. Meryon, *op. cit.*, p. 299-300.

5 Letter from Meryon to Bankes of 16 April 1816, p. 143, note 12, *Syria* LXXIV, 1997.

1 Painted tomb discovered in 1816 by W. J. Bankes at Helalié-Baramié (*Syria*, 1997)

2 Frescoes from the tomb depicting youthful servants whose names are written in Greek letters (*Syria*, 1997)

3 The servant Kalokeros (detail)

It appears today that several painted tombs as well as undecorated tombs existed in the region around the hilltop of Helalié-Baramié to the east/north east of Sidon. They were seen by Charles-Jean Melchior, the Marquis de Vogüé in 1855[6], E. Renan in 1864[7], Th. Macridi in 1904[8], G. Contenau in 1920[9], M. Meurdrac and L. Albanèse in 1938[10]. The Wadi Abu Ghiyas described and visited by Bankes in 1816 was located at the foot of this hilltop.
Helalié is the site where the royal necropolis of Ayaa was accidentally discovered in 1887. It contained the most magnificent marble sculptured sarcophagi, including the one called the "Sarcophagus of Alexander"[11] (fig. 5). It stands to reason that this necropolis covered a large area and was in use from the sixth century B.C. to the Roman period.

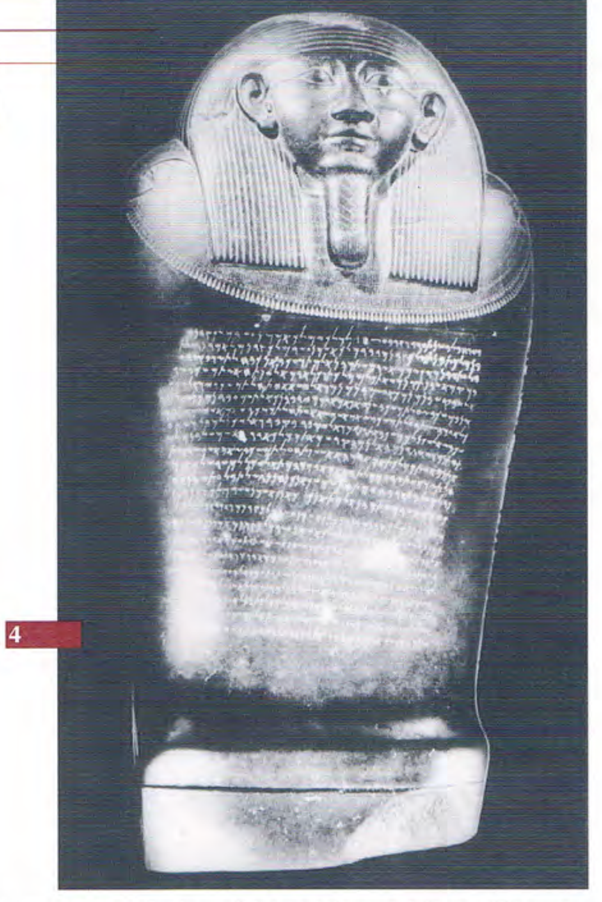
The three important necropolises of Sidon that were discovered and investigated in the 19th century and early 20th century were Magharat Abloun (commonly called the "Grotto of Apollo") situated to the south of Sidon (1855)[12], the royal necropolis of Ayaa near Helalié to the north east of Sidon (1887)[13], and the shaft graves of the necropolis at Ain el Helwé to the south east of the city (1901). These burial sites have been dated from the Persian period (550-330 B.C.) to the Hellenistic period (330 B.C. to A.D. 64)[14]. Isolated tombs have also been discovered around the outskirts of Sidon.
Two marble anthropoid sarcophagi were found in a tomb in the village of el-Merah by Georges Contenau in 1920 who made a plan of the funeral chamber[15].

The three necropolises ultimately ended up as stone quarries although at one time they had yielded some of Lebanon's greatest archaeological treasures.

1855-1963
The Necropolis of Magharat Abloun.

A chance discovery on February 20, 1855 in a rocky mound called Magharat Abloun by native Sidonians triggered off one of archaeology's greatest adventures. Antoine-Alfred Peretié, Chancellor of the French Consulate General of Beirut was an "amateur" archaeologist. He carried out private excavations in Sidon, believed to be rich in antique treasures. His foreman sent him an urgent message when he accidentally uncovered the great amphobolite sarcophagus of Eshmounazar, a 5th century B.C. king of Sidon with a twenty -two line Phoenician inscription on the lid (fig. 4) that identified him as the son of Tabnit and his sister-wife as Amo-Astarte. This discovery not only caused a sensation but led to the despatch in 1860 of a scientific mission to Lebanon by Napoleon III that was headed by Ernest Renan, a French scholar specialized in semitic philology.

6 M. de Vogüé, *Fragment d'un journal de voyage en Orient,* Paris, 1855, p. 27-30.
7 E. Renan, *Mission de Phénicie*, Paris, 1864, p. 395-399.
8 Th. C. Macridi, "A travers les nécropoles Sidoniennes" *Revue Biblique*, 1904, p. 547-572.
9 G. Contenau, "Mission archéologique à Sidon (1914) 2e article" *Syria* I, 1920, p.131.
10 M. Meurdrac, "Une Sépulture Chrétienne à Sidon", *Berytus*, IV, 2, 1937 p.130-143. M. Meurdrac et L. Albanèse, "A travers les nécropoles gréco-romaines de Sidon", *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* II, 1938, p. 73-98.
11 O. Hamdy, et Th. Reinach, *Une nécropole royale à Sidon*, Paris, 1892, p. 1 ff.
12 A. de Luynes, *Mémoire sur le sarcophage et l'inscription funéraire d'Eshmunazar roi de Sidon*, Paris, 1856, p.1.
13 O. Hamdy, et Th. Reinach, *op cit.*, p. 1 ff.
14 Ch. C. Torrey, "A Phoenician Necropolis at Sidon", *The Annual of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem* I, 1920, p. 1-27.
15 G. Contenau, *op. cit.*, 1920, p. 105-109.



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Renan uncovered six white anthropoid marble sarcophagi in 1861. They were sent to France where they are on display today in the Musée du Louvre[16]. Hoping to find more valuable archaeological remains, Renan purchased land adjacent to Magharat Abloun to carry out excavations. He appointed a French physician resident in Sidon, Joseph Charles Gaillardot to head the excavations as he was otherwise engaged in a survey of other ancient sites at Byblos and Aradus in the north of the country.

All precautions were taken to protect the necropolis. In the autumn of 1867 Gaillardot informed Renan who was in Paris at the time that stones of all sizes had been extracted from the necropolis and lay in piles ready to be transported to Sidon. Several landslides consequently occurred and the necropolis collapsed and was destroyed[17].

However, about one hundred years later, in 1963, on the same site, a shaft grave was uncovered as foundations were being laid for a modern building. This led to two sepulchral chambers that contained marble anthropoid sarcophagi, sarcophagi of the *theca* type, a wooden coffin and exquisitely worked gold jewellery that had escaped the tomb robbers of antiquity[18]. Margharat Abloun appears to have been a necropolis of the rich where a king of Sidon and notables of the city, both women and men, were buried side by side.

4 The sarcophagus of King Eshmounazar of Sidon
5 The Sarcophagus of Alexander



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16 E. Renan, *op cit.*, p. 402-412.
17 *Mission de Phénicie*, Lettre de Gaillardot à Renan du 29 septembre 1867, p. 429.
18 Ch. Ghadban, "La nécropole de l'époque perse de Magharat Tabloun", *Liban, l'autre Rive*, Paris, Flammarion, 1998, p. 147-149; R. Donceel, 1969, "Notes archéologiques concernant les fouilles et études entreprises au Liban depuis 1962", *Les Cahiers de l'Oronte*,7, p. 44.
19 O. Hamdy et Th. Reinach, *op cit.*, 1892, p. 1ff.
20 W. K. Eddy, "Letter from Sidon, Phoenicia (March 1887)", *American Journal of Archaeology* III, 1887, p. 97-101.
21 W. K. Eddy, *op.cit.*, p. 87 ff.
22 "Saida", *American Journal of Archaeology*, VI, 1890, p. 186.
23 G. Mendel, *Catalogue des sculptures* I N°. 82, Constantinople, 1912 p. 226-228; N°. 94, p. 247-249.
24 *Op cit.*, N°. 84, p. 230-231.
25 G. Mendel, *op cit.*, N°. 85, p. 232-233.
26 *Op cit.*, N°. 87, p. 234-235.

1887
The Royal necropolis of Ayaa - Osman Hamdy Bey

In the early spring of 1887 Mehmet Cherif, the proprietor of a tract of land called Ayaa (fig. 6), on the north east outskirts of Sidon at Helalié, was exploiting it as a quarry. Whilst digging for stone, one of his workmen uncovered a tomb shaft. This led to the discovery of a series of rock-cut tombs on two levels, named Hypogeum A and Hypogeum B by Osman Hamdy Bey, curator of the Imperial Ottoman Museum [19].

However, the first report of this sensational find was sent in March 1887 by William King Eddy, an American missionary residing in Sidon at the time, to the *American Journal of Archaeology* [20]. At nightfall the workman made his way to Eddy's home. Both men hurried off through Sidon's dark streets and orange groves to the open field. They lowered themselves by means of a rope down to the deep shaft into the musty tomb. In the flickering candlelight Eddy realized that this was no ordinary burial site but a discovery of great importance. His amazement along with his first impressions are described in this early published description of the royal necropolis of Ayaa that yielded the superb marble sarcophagi known as "the Lycian", "the Weepers", "the Satrap" and the so-called "Sarcophagus of Alexander" (because of the reliefs depicting battle and hunting scenes in which the Macedonian King is seen) [21] (fig. 5).

Osman Hamdy Bey sailed for Beirut on April 18, 1887 and headed immediately for Sidon by horseback. He was assisted by Demosthenes Baltazzi. While examining the tombs, Hamdy came across a small opening in the roof. This led him to the discovery of Hypogeum B and the sarcophagus of Tabnit, a sixth century B.C. priest-king of Sidon (father of Echmounazar II whose sarcophagus had been discovered at Magharat Abloun in 1855).

What was the fate of the necropolis which yielded such valuable treasurers? A terse report in the *American Journal of Archaeology* in 1890 provides the answer [22].

"The admirable necropolis from which were taken those magnificent sarcophagi which the Museum of Constantinople removed from Saïda three years ago, has been annihilated! For the rock in which were these beautiful sepulchral vaults worthy of the archaeological marvels which they contained, the very rock, had been brutally torn up and transformed into stupid masonry. And there, where reposed the body of King Tabnit, there is only an empty pit.
The grandiose subterranean Museum, which earthquakes and the devastations of conquerors and centuries of barbarism could not destroy, has been effaced by the criminal stupidity of a miserable gardener of Saïda".

During the latter part of the 19th century several anthropoid sarcophagi from Sidon were sent to the Ottoman authorities by the individuals on whose lands they appeared. One from Baramié provoked much interest. The features of the face and hair were sculptured in the finest Greek style but the artist for some unknown reason added an Egyptian plaited beard. A second sarcophagus from Baramié is of white limestone: the upper part of the face is broken, the headdress, plaited beard and the features of the face are Egyptian whereas the body of the sarcophagus resembles the anthropoid models of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. from Sidon [23]. It would appear that the tombs at Baramié and Helalié were part of one vast necropolis dated to the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.

Another sarcophagus from Ain Zeitoun (fig. 3, p. 5) is carved in white grey marble. The sculptured head portrays a young thick-lipped youth with empty staring eyes and drooping mouth [24]. A white marble sarcophagus from Mieh-Mieh resembles the Ain Zeitoun anthropoid but less care is given to detail [25]. The last anthropoid from Sidon to find its way to the Imperial Museum in Istanbul also came from Mieh-Mieh [26]. Here again the mode of execution was hasty and mediocre. It would appear that an important cemetery existed in the locality of Mieh-Mieh during and beyond the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.

1901
The necropolis at Ain el- Helwé

At Ain el-Helwé, (fig. 3, p. 5) to the south east of Sidon, on land which belonged to the American

Presbyterian Mission, a series of shaft graves were found that contained a number of white marble anthropoid sarcophagi in funeral chambers. An agreement was reached between the Mission and the American School in Jerusalem to explore the site[27].

Eleven anthropoid sarcophagi were exhumed in the course of this excavation and eight others in subsequent years, making it one of the largest finds ever. Called the "Ford Collection" in honor of the Director of the American Mission School, these were donated to the Beirut National Museum where they form an impressive site as they lie side by side in the lower ground level of the museum. They are a silent testimony to the wealth of the upper class Sidonian man and woman of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.

Ain el Helwé in subsequent years was occupied by Palestinian refugees who built houses and facilities on the site. Apart from a plan of the tomb chambers there is no information on the fate of this important necropolis[28].

1913
Georges Contenau Mission

In the spring of 1913, an agreement was reached between the French and Ottoman authorities to carry out excavations at Sidon. Georges Contenau was appointed head of mission and began work in the area of Magharat Abloun where two necropolises had been excavated by the Renan Mission. Believing the necropolis extended still further, Contenau chose to explore a triangular piece of land between the two burial grounds. Here he dug trenches and found funerary chambers that contained *cippi* (headstones), pottery, lamps, vases and sarcophagi of the Roman period. It yielded one sarcophagus worthy of note. On one end is a sculptured relief of a ship riding the waves. Contenau named it "*Le Sarcophage au Navire*" (Beirut National Museum)[29].

Contenau then turned to the foothills of the city and explored Kafer-Jarra, where a series of rock-cut tombs were found (fig. 10, p. 23). Several pottery jugs in the burial chambers were piriform in shape with button bases[30].

On a hillside near the village of Helalié, Contenau uncovered more tombs[31]. He then set out to find a painted tomb which the natives told him had been entered in the past and then closed. (Could this have been the painted tomb that Bankes visited and sketched the frescoes?). He located it on the opposite side of the hill. The tomb had Greek inscriptions and wall paintings but roof collapse and humidity had wrought their part. Contenau dated it to the Roman period and called it the "*Cavernes aux Inscriptions*"[32] (fig. 8).

In a garden in the village of Eulman (Almoun) (fig. 4, p. 77) in the foothills rising up from the northern bank of the el-Awaly river, Contenau

27 Ch. C. Torrey, 1920, *op cit.*, p.1.
28 Ch. C. Torrey, *op. cit.*, p. 5, Fig. 2; See p. 2, fig. 1 for a drawing of a cross section of a shaft tomb at Ain El-Helwé.
29 G. Contenau, "Mission archéologique à Sidon (1914)", *Syria* 1, 1920, p. 20-30.
30 G. Contenau, *op cit.*, p. 57-60.
31 G. Contenau, *op cit.*, p. 69.
32 G. Contenau, *op. cit.*, p. 147-154, 198-205.

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6 Sidon's main cemeteries, 1892

uncovered a funerary grotto. It contained a large stone sarcophagus whose cover had been displaced by robbers. Nearby stood a second stone sarcophagus that had been violated and its lid gone. A mosaic stele had been placed over it. In the center of the mosaic were the busts of a man and a woman named Theoros and Alaphatha, with an inscribed curse on whoever disturbed them. Alaphatha wished to emphasize that it was she alone who was responsible for this burial[33].

Returning to Almoun after an absence of six years Contenau found three broken pieces of a marble plaque in a well near the tomb of Alaphatha and Theoros. The Greek inscription reads: *"Theoros and Alaphetha, it is she who bought and built this tomb"*[34]. Alaphatha did not miss an opportunity to mention that it was she alone who had arranged for this remarkable burial for her husband and herself.

1937
P. E. Guigues Mission

Sidon soon became the center of intense archaeological activity. In 1937 P. E. Guigues opened Middle Bronze Age tombs in Ruweise, Lebe'a (fig. 9), Kafer-Jarra and Qrayé[35] (fig. 3, p. 5; fig. 10) in the foothills overlooking the city.

1938
M. Meurdrac and L. Albanèse Mission

This was followed in 1937-1938 by an investigation of the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine necropolises of Sidon by M. Meurdrac and L. Albanèse[36].

1967
Excavations at Sidon-Dakerman by Roger Saidah

The oldest necropolis was discovered in 1967 by Roger Saidah, an archaeologist with the Lebanese Department of Antiquities, in the area known today as Sidon-Dakerman and which lies to the south of Sidon (fig. 3, p. 5). This burial ground was used by the Sidonians from the 14th century B.C. until the Roman period. Saidah uncovered tombs dated to the Late Bronze Age (1400-1200 B.C.) at which time the dead were buried directly in the sand along with the necessary tomb goods needed for the after-life: this included local pottery with Cypriot and Mycenaean vessels[37].

The necropolis lay above an earlier settlement of the Chalcolithic Age (3500 B.C.) consisting of monocellular huts oval in shape. It is the most extensive settlement found in Sidon and second only to the one found in Byblos in importance[38]. Other tombs were brought to light. R. Saidah mentions tombs of the Late Hellenistic period and the beginning of the Roman period when the body was laid in a coffin of clay[39].

33 G. Contenau, *op.cit.*, p. 111-114.

34 G. Contenau, "Deuxième mission archéologique à Sidon", 1920, *Syria* IV, 1923 (troisième article), p. 123-124.

35 P. E. Guigues, "Lebe'a, Kafer-Garra, Qrayé, nécropoles de la région sidonienne", *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* 1, 1937, p. 35-76; second article *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* II, 1938, p. 27-72; O. Tufnell, "Tomb 66 at Ruweise, near Sidon", *Berytus* XXIV, 1975-76, p. 5-25.

36 M. Meurdrac and L. Albanèse, "A travers les nécropoles gréco-romaines de Sidon", *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* II, 1938, p. 73-98, second article, *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* III, 1939, p. 37-51, M. Meurdrac, "Une sépulture chrétienne à Sidon", *Berytus* IV Fasc. II, 1937, p. 130-143.

37 R. Saidah, *Les fouilles de Saida -Dakerman, Liban: tombe de l'âge du Bronze Récent d'une nécropole à Sidon.* Doctorat de 3 ème cycle, Université de Paris I, Sorbonne, 1977.

38 R. Saidah, "Fouilles de Sidon-Dakerman, l'agglomération Chalcolithique", *Berytus* XXVII, 1979, p. 29-55.

39 R. Saidah, "Archaeology in the Lebanon (1968-1969)", *Berytus* XVIII, 1969, p. 122.

40 R. Saidah, "Une tombe de l'âge du fer à Tambourit (région de Sidon)" *Berytus*, XXV, 1977 p. 135-146.

41 R. Saidah "Chronique", *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, XX, 1967, p. 171.

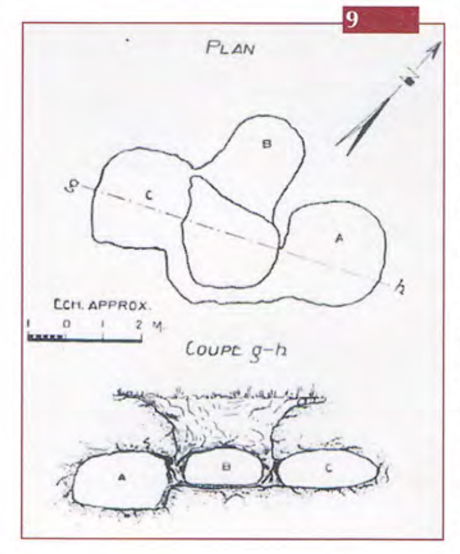
42 Strabo 16.2.24.

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1971

Excavation of an Iron Age tomb at Tambourit south-east of Sidon by Roger Saidah[40] (fig. 11).

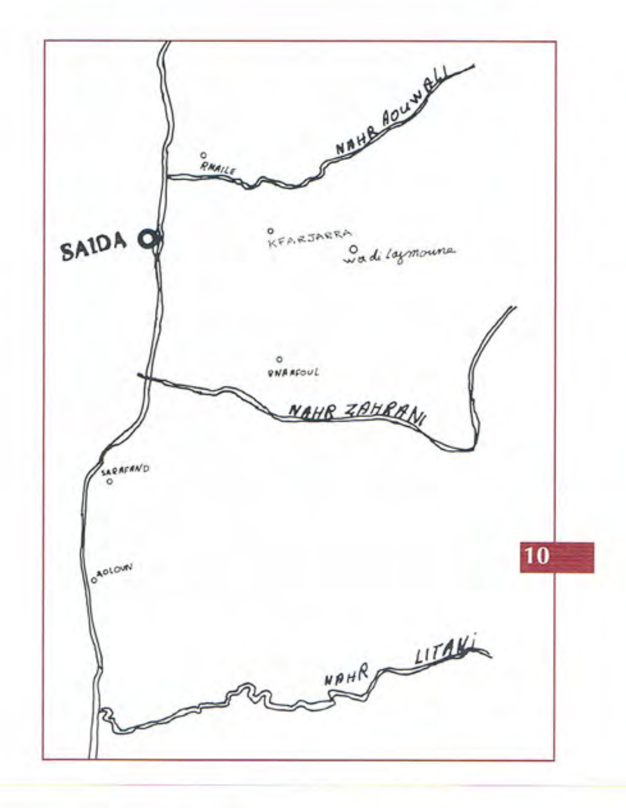
The excavation revealed five cinerary urns, one pyxis, a Greek import from the second half of the 9th century B.C., as well as jugs and plates.

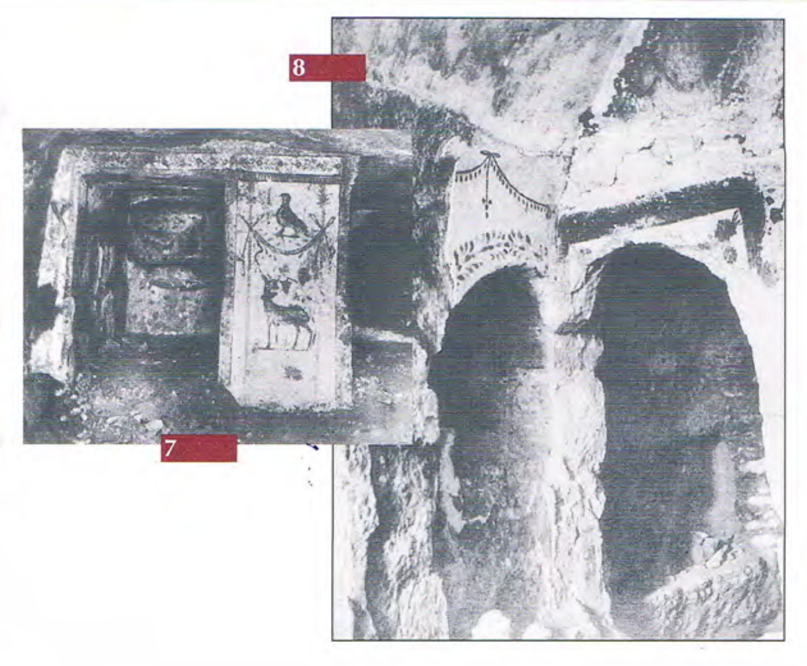


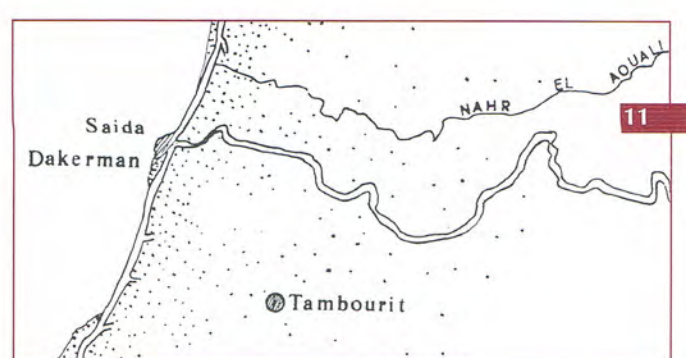
In ancient times, Sidon enjoyed a privileged position as an important port city on the Phoenician coast. Traces of the Chalcolithic period were found during the excavation at Dakerman. Early[41] and Middle Bronze Age remains were found from other tombs overlooking the city (fig. 4, p. 77).

During the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman periods the city grew and vast necropolises also studded the foothills overlooking the city. Two kings of Sidon, Tabnit (6th century B.C.) and his son Eshmounazar II, (5th century B.C.) were buried in great style in imported Egyptian sarcophagi in the royal necropolis of Ayaa and at Magharat Abloun. Why this king of Sidon and his son were buried at such a distance from each other will always remain a mystery as it was usual for a father and a son to be buried near each other to allow communication in the afterlife.

Although many of these necropolises have disappeared and were used as stone quarries, the rich archaeological material they yielded is eloquent testimony to the ability and skill of Sidon's stone cutters and sculptors. This prompted the Greek geographer Strabo to write in the 2nd century A.D.; "The Sidonians were skilled in many beautiful arts"[42].







7 Painted tomb from Baramié discovered by Contenau in 1924
8 The "*caverne aux inscriptions*" discovered by G. Contenau
9 Plan of Lebe'a tomb n° 1
10-11 Maps of Sidon and its necropolises (R. Zarzour)

Sidon's Main Cemeteries

Period	Cemetery
CHALCOLITHIC	Dakerman (R. Saidah 1968-1969)
EARLY BRONZE/MIDDLE BRONZE AGE	Bna'foul and Wadi el-Leymoun (R. Saidah and Ch. Ghadbane, 1967) (unpublished)
MIDDLE BRONZE AGE	Kafer-jarra (G. Contenau, 1914-1924; P. E. Guigues, 1937-38) Ruweise (P. E. Guigues, 1937-1938) Lebe'a, (P. E. Guigues, 1937-1938) Qrayé, (P. E. Guigues, 1937-1938)
LATE BRONZE AGE	Dakerman (R. Saidah, 1968-1969)
IRON AGE	Tambourit (R. Saidah, 1977)
PERSIAN/HELLENISTIC PERIOD	Magharet Abloun (A. A. Peritié, 1855; E. Renan, 1864; G. Contenau, 1920) Ayaa (W. K. Eddy, 1887; O. Hamdy, 1892; G. Contenau, 1920) Ain El-Helwé (Ch.-C.Torrey, 1919-1920) El-Merah (G. Contenau, 1920) { Baramié, Helalié, Ain Zeitoun, Mieh-Mieh — (Found during the latter part of the 19th century by individuals on whose lands they appear and are today in the Archaelogical Museum at Istanbul).
GRAECO/ROMAN PERIODS	Qrayé (G. Contenau, 1920) Almoun (G. Contenau, 1924) El-Harah (Th. Macridi Bey, 1904; G. Contenau, 1924) Magharet Abloun (E. Renan, 1964; G. Contenau, 1914-1924) Helalié/Baramié (W. J. Bankes, 1816; E. Renan, 1864; G. Contenau, 1914; M. Meurdrac & L. Albanèse, 1938-1939)
BYZANTINE PERIOD	Mar Elias/Baramié (M. Meurdrac, 1937)